

ON EFL LEARNERS' IDIOM ACQUISITION: A QUANTITATIVE COMPARATIVE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluates the potentially relative effectiveness of three different teaching methods applied for the acquisition of idioms by Iranian and Lithuanian intermediate EFL learners in university settings. To this end, 234 homogeneous intermediate learners were selected and randomly assigned to six equal groups (three Iranian and three Lithuanian groups). Following a pre-test, the six groups attended four sessions of teaching in which all the learners received the same set of idioms through different methods: the first group -translation group- received treatment via translation of idioms in specific contexts. The second group -historical origin and picture group - underwent teaching of idioms via presented related picture and cultural origin. The third group -output task group - received instruction through completing two types of output tasks. The results on idiom acquisition were processed statistically and it was established that teaching idioms with related picture and cultural note has a satisfactory significant effect on the acquisition of target items. Furthermore, a cognitive-learning questionnaire was given to all respondents before any instruction to assess if there was any consistency between the learning strategy for idiom acquisition and the applied effective method. The research revealed that although most of the participants focused primarily on meaning and contained words of an idiom before instruction, the picture along with cultural and historical note method fostered their learning.

Key words: English as a foreign language, Dual coding, Learning and cognitive style, Pictorial, Output tasks

1. INTRODUCTION

It has been noted that the Second Language (L2) learners often fail in achieving effective communication (Calviño, 2011; Tran, 2012) due to the lack of idiomatic knowledge which can be processed as whole units (Zhao, 2009, p. 1). Y. Zhao (2009, p. 10) further highlights that a number of studies indicate the fact of fixed phrases being helpful not only to increase L2 learner motivation but also to contribute to the aspect of language fluency, accuracy, creativeness and cohesion. In addition, H.Q. Tran (2012, pp. 76-77) highlights that the idiomatic competence is one of the criteria for language proficiency and a crucial factor in the daily language. Accordingly, if collocation associations are not learned as part of the L2 knowledge, the learners' speech or writing will be immediately decided upon as non-native, odd and incompetent, and that poses a prevalent problem in present EFL situation.

The necessity of teaching idioms is completely obvious since the lack of idiom competence is noticeable when non-native speakers of English need productive language knowledge. Students either use only the limited number of idioms they know or under the influence of their first language create unnatural and farfetched collocations. Therefore, the overgeneralization of collocation range is quite risky. Thus, from many researchers we can reasonably infer that because collocation capacity cannot be spontaneously acquired, the teaching of idioms is absolutely integral to the encoding of a language by non-native speakers. A lot of research has been carried out in this area, however, a burning issue both for language researchers and practitioners still remains what are the best ways to teach idioms in class situation.

Although translating is an ancient practice, it has been formally and systematically studied in a non-evaluative way for less than thirty years. Many researchers (Griffin, 2004; Mustonen, 2010; Rostamzadeh, 2011; PACTE, 2011) have suggested translation as a method for teaching culture-specific items (CSIs), such as idioms. Some researchers have investigated that both methods—picture and explanation about historical and cultural origin of idiom—evoke mental imagery (Lakoff, 1987), and can be treated as an application, or of the cognitive linguistic (CL) views on idiomaticity. They investigate 'imagery' in the sense of verbal and non-verbal elements that may stimulate the formation of conventional images (Lakoff, 1987, pp. 446–447) associated with the literal readings of idioms. The more recent research on the function of output (Izumi and Bigelow, 2000) is based on the assumption that drawing learners' attention to target forms, as they arise incidentally in lessons with an overriding focus on meaning and communication, makes it easier for the learners to acquire form and meaning of idiom simultaneously.

Thus, the importance of idioms on one hand, and the significance of formal instruction (in this particular case, teaching through translation, presenting picture with cultural origin and output tasks), on the other hand, have encouraged the researchers to conduct this work. Given the purpose of this research, three ways for treatments of idioms are briefly introduced below.

2. REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

2.1. Idiom, Culture and Translation Competence Model

One of the unique ways in which the assembly of particular words and expressions, stemming from one's culture or language, is in the form of language idiomatic expressions (Marzocchi, 2010). Also, L.E. Grant and L. Bauer (2004) propose that figuratives can be made sense by stretching the known meaning of individual words (p. 51). Another defining characteristic of idioms is their frozenness or fixedness (Grant & Bauer, 2004), which entails both limited substitutability and lack of grammatical flexibility.

Since the concept of culture is essential to understanding the implications for literary translation and culture-specific items in translation, many researchers in translation have dealt with the definition of culture. B. Ivanovska and A.S. Groszeler (2011) drew attention to the relationship between idiomatic expressions and culture:

"Idioms are also interesting to study because of the insight they give us into the language and the people who use them. These expressions originate in the history, literature, religion, and traditions typical of a certain community. For this reason, idioms reveal much of the way of thinking of a community." (p. 28)

Thus, while idioms pose a linguistic challenge in effectively interpreting the idioms of one language as compared to those of another, the cultural challenge is more significant. (Ghafel et al., 2011, p. 160).

The realization that texts must carry out a communicative purpose has resulted in the concept of translation competence. This study will adopt the holistic competence model of The PACTE Group (Process of Acquisition of Translation Competence and Evaluation) as it is one of the most sophisticated one in translation studies which has following components: bilingual sub-competence (for solving translation problems at the lexical, syntactic, and textual level), extra-linguistic sub-competence (background knowledge), knowledge about translation, instrumental sub-competence (translation resources, dictionaries, parallel texts, glossaries), strategic sub-competence (for monitoring and coordinating the whole translation, which includes planning the process, identifying and solving problems, activating most appropriate strategies and evaluating the product) and psycho-physiological (psychomotor, cognitive and attitudinal factors) components (PACTE, 2011). M. Gonzalez Davies (2004) suggests that teachers can improve students' competence and performance by exploring areas of psychology and pedagogy which encourage cooperation, motivation and participation as well as the development of students' mental processes.

It is worth to note that A. Rostamzadeh (2008, p. 10) argues that a translation class can be invested to improve foreign language competence. F. Griffin (2004, p. 463) claims that translation may lead to learning because translation encourages learners to have fun with language and to think about language as a creative tool, while realizing the potential for misunderstanding when communicators lack a common culture. By making learners active decoders and translators, this method allows learners to experience that potential and to realize, in a memorable way, the rationale for prescriptive warnings about figurative idioms in intercultural communication. It is further pointed out that the method deepens an appreciation for the kinds of translation learners do daily, as they navigate between worlds that only partially and imperfectly share a common language and shared meaning.

There are no ready-made, fixed strategies to be prescribed to translators in dealing with idioms and it is up to the translator to draw upon the best strategies while translating idioms. Although all translation exercises involve an inevitable loss of a number of idioms, some idioms can also be gained in the process (Mustonen, 2010, p. 44). S. Mustonen further states that "the most recommended translation strategy for idioms is translating them with a natural target language idiom which has the same meaning as the original source language idiom." C.Helleklev suggests that there are four ways of handling idioms: 1) translating an idiom with an equivalent idiom or 2) explanatory everyday expression, 3) using an idiom instead of an everyday expression and 4) word for word translation (Helleklev, 2006, p. 27). The other solution offered by K.E. Jensen to translation of idioms is "Basically to apply the same decode-representation-encode strategy" (Jensen, 2008, pp. 5-6) which is finding the meaning and encoding it into the receptor text (translation). "In case of not finding a similar idiom or an idiom, he suggests, "you will have to use an ordinary universal term". S. Sornsuwannarsi (2010) points to four strategies used for translating idioms in her research: free translation, equivalent translation, omission, and literal translation.

In this case, translation theory does not provide a set of hard-and-fast rules, which, when followed, will ensure that the translator will come up with a perfect translation. What translation theory can do, however, is to make the translator aware of various factors which are involved in the translation process and offer some principles and guidelines that will help the translator to make certain decisions and choices.

2.2. Idiom Characteristic Features

2.2.1. Semantic structure

Based on the Idiomaticity Theory adopted by D. Dobrovol'skij and E. Piirainen (2005, pp. 39–44), opacity, or lack of transparency, refers to the difficulty in explaining the link between the lexical structure and the actual meaning of the idiom. The image component is 'a specific conceptual structure mediating between the lexical structure and the actual meaning of figurative units' (Dobrovol'skij and Piirainen, 2005, p. 14). It is postulated that relevant elements of the image component can be included in the explication of an idiom in order to raise the awareness of the difference between the idiom and its non-figurative equivalent. If, as D. Dobrovol'skij and E. Piirainen (2005, p. 80) observe, the strategies used for processing the image triggered by the lexical structure of the idiom "stabilize the understanding of the idiom", the insertion of illustrations and culture origin background in teaching of idioms seems to be justified.

2.2.2. Idioms as motivated lexical units

Motivation refers to a speaker's ability to make sense of an idiomatic expression by reactivating or remotivating their figuratively, i.e. to understand why the idiom has the idiomatic meaning it has with a view to its literal meaning' (Langlotz, 2006, p. 45). CL holds that most idioms are motivated, even if motivation is a gradable and subjective phenomenon, dependent on the speaker's knowledge, experience, age, etc. Motivation does not imply predictability and the meanings of the idioms can be seen as motivation and not arbitrary (Lakoff, 1987). For instance, we cannot guess that "*to take the bull by the horns*" means "to deal with a difficult or dangerous situation in a direct and brave way" on the basis of the lexical makeup of the phrase. One could as well hypothesize that the idiom means "to act recklessly, foolishly". However, once the actual meaning is known, one makes sense of the idiom. The bull stands for the difficult situation, whereas the act of taking it by the horns—for tackling the situation. We would like to suggest that the implication of these ideas for teaching idioms is that this kind of motivation should facilitate the teachability/ learnability of idioms. Theoretically, at least by providing the learners with cognitive motivation for idioms, learners should be able to learn the idioms faster and retain them longer in memory. Motivation of idioms arises from knowledge of the cognitive mechanisms (metaphor, metonymy, conventional knowledge) and this links idiomatic meanings to literal ones and has important implications for teaching/learning idioms.

2.2.3. The Effects of Imagery and Cultural Origin on Idiom Learning

Giving culture origin information in teaching idioms is not without merits, since it may raise awareness of language change, development and show relationships between words and real life situation. Last but not least, people claim to enjoy

notes on culture origin (Landau, 2001, p. 101), which may increase learners' motivation and interest in idiomatic expressions. Culture origin background can be instructive, provided that they are understandable (Landau, 2001, p. 102), and not too long.

Committing new idioms to long-term memory in a way that taps the motivating links should be a less daunting task than simple parrot-like learning, in line with the well-known principle that "it is easier to remember and use motivated knowledge than arbitrary knowledge" (Lakoff, 1987, p. 346). According to the levels of processing theory (Craik and Lockhart, 1972) and the dual coding theory (Paivio, 1986), memory performance is a function of the depth of processing, and visual and verbal information are processed and stored along different channels. Accordingly, extensive processing of the information stimulating mental imagery may enhance the depth of processing and, additionally, encourage the processing of verbal information through the non-verbal code. Storing information via both memory channels: verbal and non-verbal should have a favorable effect upon the comprehension and retention of words. Apparently, 'reading a brief culture origin explanation is equally beneficial to retention (through dual coding) as correctly identifying the SD (source domain) followed by reading the culture origin explanation' (Boers et al., 2008, p. 73). It has been revealed by that the scores for correctly interpreted opaque idioms are not particularly affected by the presentation of culture origin information due to the learners' affective factor.

2.2.4. Static Pictures in Learning Idioms

F. Boers et al. (2008) demonstrated, that pictures can also act as mnemonic devices. Pictures best represent complex and abstract phenomena, unusual or unfamiliar things. Their primary function should not be purely aesthetic, but explanatory, complementary to the explication in the definition (Stein, 1991, p. 105), especially when the definition would have to be extremely complicated. In order to fulfill their instructive functions, they require contextualization, and this is achieved by means of captions, verbal elements, often in the form of a full sentence. Further, in spite of the presence of contextualizing captions, pictures do not represent statements, but ideas (Anglin et al., 2004, p. 867). Our cognition predetermines the ways we view the picture. We actively construct the meaning in the picture. Our perception is also a result of the knowledge of conventions, due to which we can interpret the outline drawings as the edges of objects (Anglin et al., 2004, p. 867).

2.3. Output Hypothesis and output tasks

With the proposal of M. Swain's Output Hypothesis (2005), the learning output has come to be deemed not merely as an end product of learning, but as an important factor to promote L2 learning. It has been noted that producing the target language provides learners with unique opportunities for a level of processing (i.e., syntactic processing) that may be needed for the development of target-like proficiency and higher accuracy (Izumi& Bigelow, 2000).

The more recent research on the noticing function of output (Izumi& Bigelow, 2000) are based on the assumption that drawing learners' attention to target forms, as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focuses are meaning and communication, makes it easier for them to acquire form and meaning simultaneously. R. Schmidt (2001) postulates that input does not become intake for language learning unless it is noticed, i.e., consciously registered. It was further proposed that nothing is learned unless it has been noticed. In a more conservative weak version, it is said that noticing does not itself result in acquisition, but it paves the way for acquisition to occur. According to noticing hypothesis attention, noticing and awareness, are crucial in perceiving different features of language.

Recent second language acquisition (SLA) research has demonstrated a need for classroom activities that promote both communicative interaction and attention to form in second language (L2) classrooms (Ellis, 2003, 2005). One way of promoting such opportunities is through pedagogical tasks that encourage negotiation of meaning, while at the same time providing opportunities for attention to form (Ellis, 2003). Arguments for the role of output have shown that exposure to input-based communication is not enough to develop target like accuracy. The studies have suggested that despite ample exposure to meaning-based interaction and comprehensible input, learners are still inaccurate with respect to certain aspects of the L2 idioms. This is to be due to the fact that learners in such contexts do not have enough opportunities for language production and focus on form (Swain, 2005).

M. Swain (2005) has identified three functions for output: a noticing function, a hypothesis-testing function, and a metalinguistic function. The noticing function holds that when learners produce output, they may notice gaps in their knowledge because through output they may realize that they cannot say what they want to say. Producing output also provides learners with opportunities for hypothesis testing; that is, when talking to others, learners may try out different ways of saying the same thing and may come to realize whether their utterances are comprehensible and well formed. When learners cannot express their intended meanings, they may search their existing linguistic knowledge to find solution to the problem. If they cannot find a solution, they might seek help from others and/or pay closer attention to the subsequent input. Another function of output is a metalinguistic function. That is, output may encourage learners to consciously reflect upon language and consciously think about what to say and what not to say.

In light of the above theoretical arguments, several studies described below have empirically examined the role of output tasks in L2 learning. M.P. Garcia Mayo (2002) compared the effectiveness of a dictogloss with a text reconstruction task (a text that had certain grammatical words missing, such as articles, prepositions and function words, and the learners had to supply them). It was arrived at the conclusion that a text –reconstruction task was an effective form-focused task in her study, but she stressed the need for further research in this area. Some recent classroom studies seem to advocate the use of both cloze and editing tasks (Storch, 2007; Garcia Mayo, 2002). Studies by T.Pica et al. (2006) have also suggested that cloze exercises are useful information gap tasks that can provide effective contexts for pushed output and negotiation about language forms. Furthermore, editing tasks are frequently used in L2 classrooms (Storch, 2007), but few studies have examined their effectiveness for L2 learning.

3. METHODOLOGY

The present study was conducted to examine the potential effects of using different teaching instructions, translation, historical and cultural origin explanation accompanied by related picture and output tasks (closing and editing) on the idiom acquisition of EFL learners.

Another purpose of current research was to assess whether there was any consistency among the learning strategies that the learners usually had used to learn a new expression before any instruction and the effective method that was applied in this research. In order to attain the purpose of the study, the researchers employed both descriptive and

experimental methods to collect the required data. This section contains the details concerning the participants, instrumentation and materials, and the procedure for data collection.

The participants of this study consisted of 300 junior university students in three different classes majoring in English translation at Payam Noor University in Iran and Mykolas Romeris university in Lithuania. However, after administering a homogenizing proficiency test, there remained 234 students with the same level of English proficiency divided into three groups in each country. Each group received one form of the intended instruction at random.

The target words were 29 English idioms. The reasons for focusing on idioms were that these idioms were foreseen to be difficult to master and constituted the teacher's plan of the observed classes. The idioms were from the textbook to be covered throughout a semester. The research was performed in two different countries- Iran and Lithuania.

In order to collect the required data in this study several instruments were used: an English proficiency test with 90 items containing of 40 grammar items (sentence completion in two-line dialogs), 30 vocabulary items (contextualized synonyms and sentence completion), and 20 reading comprehension items based on 4 reading passages. The time allocated to this test was 60 minutes.

It included six different learning strategies (picture association, memorization, translation, contained words, overall meaning and structure) to determine prevalent learning strategies applied by learners before any type of teaching. The validity and reliability of the questionnaire were calculated and the results proved that the administered questionnaire met both requirements.

Before the instructional treatment started, the subjects were pre-tested in order to ensure that all three groups were equivalent in terms of their general knowledge of idioms. The pre-test comprised 28 multiple-choice (MC) items from which targeted idioms were missing and the subjects were required to complete the sentences by selecting the correct choice.

In order to determine the effect of three types of instruction on the acquisition of the target forms, a 29 items MC post-test was constructed to test the meaning of target idioms.

4. PROCEDURE

As the first step of the research, 300 Iranian and Lithuanian students majoring in English translation took a homogenizing proficiency test. Based on the obtained scores, three homogeneous Iranian groups, each consisting of 38, 47 and 34 members and three homogeneous Lithuanian students, each consisting of 35, 42, 38 respectively, were formed in order to collect the target data. Then, the pretest was performed. After that, the students received treatment during 4 teaching hours, 4 sessions. For Groups 1, 28 original short texts, each with one idiom and its meaning, were given in individual pamphlets to each student (Appendix 1). They translated those texts with researcher's guidance and found the equivalent of the idiom in target language.

Groups 2 were given explanation about the origin of each idiom (historical, cultural, literal, etc) accompanied by the related picture (picture was drawn based on literal meaning of the idiom) with a view to stimulate dual coding memory, processing theory in a pamphlet (Appendix 2). According to A. Cieslick's (2006) study, learners' inclination to look for clues in the literal meaning of the constituent words of an idiom and the association of the figurative phrases with images of concrete scenes help them to comprehend and remember meaning of L2 idioms better.

For Groups 3, 2 output tasks were prepared based on the exactly the same texts used for Group 1: cloze and editing tasks (Appendix 3). Each task contained randomly 14 of the 28 target idioms. Each mini rational cloze test contained missing parts all of them were related to the meaning of the target idioms. For the cloze task, the teacher first read the original text that the cloze task was based on at the normal pace twice, and the students were asked to listen to the reading carefully for meaning and wrote down notes related to the content. Then the students received the cloze version of the text and were asked to restore the missing sections as correctly and as closely as possible to the original text. After a cloze task, the students completed an editing task and were asked to correct any erroneous section as correctly and closely as possible to the original dialogue. Here again, the erroneous section were those parts of idiom related to the meaning of it. The amount of time, 10 minutes, to complete each task was suggested by the teacher, based on the average amount of time students took to complete similar tasks before.

The cognitive-style questionnaire that the teachers used in this study was constructed by the researcher herself. At the start of the course, respondents were invited to indicate from six learning strategies (picture association, memorization, translation, contained words, overall meaning and structure) which one they mostly preferred to use when they encounter an idiom.

5. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

At the outset of this study, a 90-item proficiency test was given to 300 Iranian and Lithuanian senior university students majoring in English translation in order to choose a homogeneous learner sample. After scoring the test, a thorough process of item analysis was conducted in order to identify the faulty items. All items with IF indexes between .30 and .70 and ID indexes above .30 were retained on the test and the rest were discarded. The final version of the proficiency test included a total of 64 items consisting of 25 grammar items, 22 vocabulary items and 17 reading comprehension items. Then, the participants' papers were rescored on the basis of the remaining items, and 119 students from Iran and 115 from Lithuania with scores between one standard deviation above and below the mean were chosen as the main participants of the study. The descriptive statistics of the homogeneity proficiency test of the six newly formed groups appears in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the Homogeneity Proficiency Test of the Iranian & Lithuanian Groups

Group	N	Mean	SD	Skewness	
				Statistic	Std. Error
G1- Translation Iranian/Lithuanian	38/35	26.71/25.13	8.66/7.44	-.368/-.718	.383/.401
G2- Picture with Note Iranian/Lithuanian	47/42	28.21/26.23	5.22/6.36	-.475/-.485	.347/.357
G3- Output Task Iranian/Lithuanian	34/38	27.65/22.35	8.22/7.12	.723/.353	.403/.383

Dividing the statistic of skewness by its standard error, the research proved the assumption of normality to be observed in the distribution of the scores of the three Iranian groups and three Lithuanian groups.

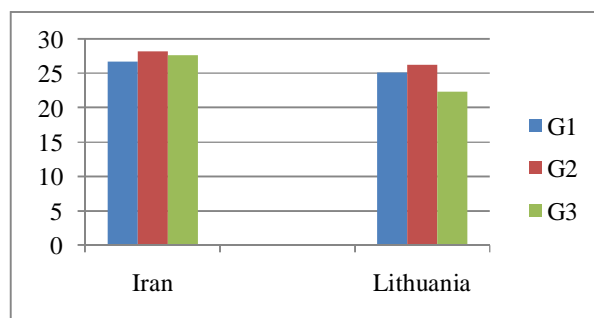


Fig. 1. The mean scores of the six groups on homogeneity proficiency test

Later, a Robust Test of Equality of Mean and ANOVA (Table 2) was run in order to establish the homogeneity of the participants regarding their writing ability at the outset of the study. Since the significance level was higher than $\alpha=0.05$, it was decided that the six groups belonged to the same population.

Table 2. Robust Tests of Equality of Means for the Proficiency

Group	Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Iranian Group	0.411	2	91.23	0.664
Lithuanian Group	0.357	2	83.45	0.567

The results of the ANOVA for both ethnic groups show that there is no significant difference between the scores of the groups in the proficiency test.

Table 3. One-way ANOVA for the Iranian & Lithuanian Group Proficiency

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups (Iranian)	47.69	2	23.84	.441	.644
Within Groups (Iranian)	6267.45	116	54.03		
Between Groups (Lithuanian)	49.69	2	21.43	.42	.702
Within Groups (Lithuanian)	6377.55	112	56.02		

Analysis of the Idiom Pre-test

In the next phase of this study, an idiom pretest consisted of the idioms to be taught. The test was administered to determine the *a priori* idiom knowledge of the participants. This would enable to investigate the possible impact of the treatment on the improvement of idiom acquisition. Table 4 summarizes the descriptive statistics of the idiom pre-test in both ethnic groups of students.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of the Iranian & Lithuanian Writing Pre-test

N		Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	
Group	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistics	Std. Error
G1-Iranian/Lithuanian	37/35	8.49/6.47	5.26/4.26	.766/.706	.388/.401
G2-Iranian/Lithuanian	45/42	7.98/8.28	3.57/5.51	-.091/-.021	.354/.357
G3-Iranian/Lithuanian	34/38	10.71/9.91	5.59/4.99	.174/.274	.403/.383

The results of the skewness analysis, as shown above in Table 4, revealed that the assumption of normality was observed in the distribution of the idiom pre-test scores of the six groups.

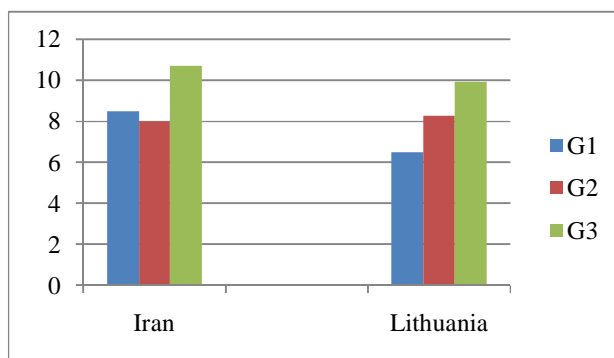


Fig. 2. The scores of the six groups on pre-test

ANOVA for the Pre-test Mean Scores

It should be noted that the six groups were homogenous in terms of their variances. The Levene's F of 4.64 and 5.25 has a probability of .102 and .304 (Table 5). Since the probability associated with the Levene F is higher than the .05 level of significance it can be concluded that the six groups enjoyed homogenous variances.

Table 5. Levene's Test of Homogeneity of Variances for the six Pretest

Group	Levene Statistic	Sig.
Iranian Group	4.64	0.102
Lithuanian Group	5.25	0.304

In order to determine the homogeneity of the participants regarding their idiom skill, the research ran an ANOVA. The probability associated with the F-observed value of Iranian groups (.37) was higher than the significant level of .05. Also the probability associated with the F-observed value of Lithuanian groups (.42) was higher than the significant level of .05. Therefore, it was safely concluded that all groups belonged to the same population in terms of idiom before the treatment.

Table 6. One-way ANOVA for the Iranian & Lithuanian Pre-test

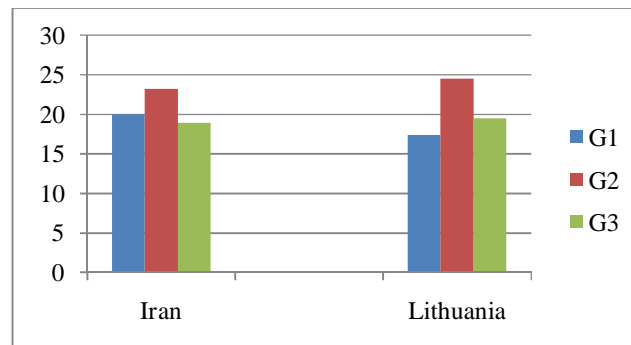
Group	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups (Iranian)	155.29	2	77.64	3.38	.37
Within Groups (Iranian)	2589.28	113	22.91		
Between Groups (Lithuanian)	125.26	2	62.63	4.22	.42
Within Groups (Lithuanian)	1569.28	112	13.92		

Analysis of the Idiom Post-test

The descriptive statistics in Table 7 reveal the mean scores of all six groups.

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics of the Iranian & Lithuanian Idiom Posttest

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	
	Statistic	Statistics	Statistics	Statistic	Std. Error
G1-Iranian/Lithuanian	37/35	20.00/17.34	3.52/2.34	-.012/-.014	.388/.401
G2-Iranian/Lithuanian	39/42	23.23/24.54	1.66/3.23	-.496/-.326	.378/.357
G3-Iranian/Lithuanian	34/38	18.97/19.45	5.323/1.44	-.514/-.364	.403/.383

**Fig. 3.** The scores of the six groups on post-test

In order to compare the means of the six groups on the idiom post-test, an ANOVA was run. As Table 8 indicates, the probability associated with the F-observed value (.000) was lower than the significant level of .05. Therefore, it was concluded that there was a significant difference among the mean scores of the six groups.

Table 8. One-way ANOVA for the Iranian & Lithuanian Post-test

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups (Iranian)	367.82	2	183.91	13.22	.000
Within Groups (Iranian)	1487.89	107	13.90		
Between Groups (Lithuanian)	436.83	2	218.41	12.32	.000
Within Groups (Lithuanian)	1654.82	107	15.46		

Since the probability associated with the F-observed value (.000) indicated significant differences among the mean scores of the six groups on the posttest, a post-hoc Scheffe's test had to be run to identify the exact location of differences among the three groups. According to Table 9, all the mean differences were significant at 0.05 level.

Table 9. Scheffee Test for the Post-test

Mean Difference				
Groups (I)	Groups (J)	(I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Translation (Iranian)	Picture with Note	-3.231*	.856	.001
	Output task	1.029	.886	.511
Picture with Note (Iranian)	Translation	3.231*	.856	.001
	Output task	4.260*	.875	.000
Output task (Iranian)	Translation	-1.029	.886	.511
	Picture with Note	-4.260*	.875	.000
Translation (Lithuanian)	Picture with Note	-2.231*	.856	.001
	Output task	1.049	.886	.311
Picture with Note (Lithuanian)	Translation	4.271*	.856	.001
	Output task	3.276*	.875	.000
Output task(Lithuanian)	Translation	-1.169	.886	.421
	Picture with Note	-3.250*	.875	.000

* The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

A Scheffee post-hoc test was employed to pinpoint exact spheres of differences. In the above tables, the difference between picture along cultural note and translation group is significant since there is an asterisk (*) next to the values listed in the second column. Similarly, the difference between output task group and picture with cultural explanation group seems to be significant. And, accordingly, it can be claimed that picture with cultural note group is significantly different from output task and translation groups. In other words, there is no statistically significant difference between translation and output task instruction in terms of the influence they exert on the acquisition of idioms. It was established that employing the use of picture with cultural background in group 2 of both nationalities contributed to greater progress in the acquisition of the idioms.

The second research question looked into cognitive or learning questionnaire, and, although idiom learners perceived idioms via different learning strategies according to their individual preferences, difficulties or successes, the research results reveal that they showed some common trends. As we can see in Table 10, most learners, facing the idiom for the first time, primarily focused on specific words and their meaning of an idiom as their learning strategy. Idiom meaning and contained words were followed by a picture, memorization and translation although not in the different sequence. The idiom structure was the least addressed category by learners of both nationalities. Most of the students opted for overall meaning and contained words in the idiom respectively as their strategies for learning a new idiom and fewer students chose picture association as their main strategy for learning it. This revealed that most students were not inclined to think in mental pictures and they were mostly low imagers than high ones. They inclined to think in contained words and meaning than visualize a new figurative expression picture for its acquisition. Consequently, it can be estimated that some students do not tend to resort to mental pictures while trying to learn new idioms, they prefer to use other strategies instead.

Table 10. Analysis of Iranian & Lithuanian learner's learning and cognitive strategies

	Picture	Memorization	Translation	Contained words	Meaning	Structure
Translation (Iranian)	12.94%	7.55%	6.04%	40.69%	30.71%	2.07%
Picture (Iranian)	21.10%	3.03%	7.20%	38.39%	30.28%	0%
Output task (Iranian)	15.34%	8.72%	4.25%	27.91%	43.51%	0%
Translation (Lithuanian)	10.93%	6.45%	7.04%	42.96%	33.75 %	5.17%
Picture (Lithuanian)	24.13%	5.03%	8.24%	40.39%	54.28%	0%
Output task (Lithuanian)	14.34%	10.72%	7.56%	28.99%	45.51%	0%

The results obtained from the compared means of the three methods of teaching showed that pictures did not have a distracting effect on students who were already prone to processing idioms via meaning and words. On the contrary, it revealed that applying picture in teaching figurative expressions is an effective idiom learning strategy.

6. DISCUSSION

According to the findings arrived at by different statistical tests, it is obvious that the subjects in Group 2 of both nationalities, who were taught via presenting pictures and related historical and cultural explanation of idiom, appeared to have benefited from this explicit method of formal instruction. This was based on the assumption that using both methods of pictures and historical and cultural explanation of idiom evoke mental imagery associated with the literal readings of idioms, which, in turn would enable participants' acquisition and better performance on the post-test.

The most convincing explanation for such a finding may come from the works of F.I.M.Craik and R.S.Lockhart (1972) in processing theory, which defines memory performance as a function of the depth of processing. Further studies of A. Paivio (1986) in dual coding theory highlighted the association of verbal information with a mental image as advantageous because it creates an additional pathway for recollecting the verbal information and also informing learners about the probable origin of an idiom is likely to call up in the learners' minds a mental picture of a concrete scene.

Moreover, the fact that the learners who received treatment through picture and historical and cultural explanation of idiom made significant gains with regard to the acquisition of idiomatic expression is consistent with the general trend observed in the works of S.I. Landau (2001, p. 101) who points out to awareness of language origin, its change and the relationship between words as particularly useful for idiom learning, stressing that people enjoy reading historical and cultural explanation of idioms which, in its own turn, increases learners' motivation and interest.

Also, it can be claimed that the results of the present study are in the same line with the views of G. Stein (1991, p. 105) that pictures best represent complex, abstract, unusual and unfamiliar things and their function should be complementary to their definition. F. Boers et al. (2008) reinforce this by pointing out that pictures can also act as mnemonic devices. Therefore, it can be claimed that the findings of this study lend support to speculations made by previous researchers that pictures have a positive impact on the L2 acquisition. Besides, the results of the research provided further empirical

support for G.J. Anglin et al. (2004) and A. Cieslick (2006) ideas. In addition, the analysis showed that motivated idioms, meaning that learners make sense of an idiomatic expression by re-motivating it figuratively (Langlotz, 2006, p. 45), through picture and historical and cultural notes facilitates idioms acquisition.

The fact that the learners who engaged in output tasks and actual production of language did not perform significantly better on the post-test suggests that having output opportunities was not effective in developing learners' idiom retention and usage. This is not in line with Output Hypothesis proposed by M. Swain (2005) who maintains that output should not be viewed merely as an end product of learning, but as an important factor to promote L2 learning. The findings of the first research question in the present study did not lend empirical support to previous experimental studies (Izumi, 2002) which claim that producing the target language provides learners with unique opportunities for a level of processing (i.e., syntactic processing) that may be needed for the development of the target-like proficiency. On the other hand, S. Izumi and M. Bigelow (2000) reported confirming findings regarding the second language acquisition. According to them, there was no significant difference in gains between those learners engaged in output tasks and those involved in non-output tasks. On the whole, it should be noted that relatively few studies to date have investigated this issue and their inconclusive findings demonstrate the need for further research.

Contrary to the expectations, the results of this research suggest that using different teaching output methods such as editing and closing tasks had no significant role in idiom learning. This questions the views by M.P. Garcia Mayo (2002), T. Pica et al. (2006) and N. Storch (2007) regarding different types of output tasks, especially editing and closing, in EFL acquisition.

Also, the results found regarding output task contradict the noticing function proposed by M. Swain (2005) and R. Schmidt (2001), by which the learner can only learn via noticing. The findings were not in the consistency of a hypothesis testing function of M. Swain (2005), according to which learners if not able to express their intended meanings, search their existing linguistic knowledge or either seek help from others or pay closer attention to the subsequent input.

There might be several reasons for not supporting the presumed advantage of output task. One reason might be related to the brief and limited nature of the output tasks that took place during instruction which not lead to the appropriation and internalization of the word knowledge. Another reason could be related to the types of the target forms which were new and difficult for the learners although we gave them adequate direction and instruction about how to complete the output tasks (editing and cloze). Other factors are participants' shared goals and assumption, learners' strategies, and their cognitive and developmental readiness. We can use other formats of output tasks such as jigsaw and dictogloss (Pica et al., 2006) because each learner holds part of task and hence is required to contribute his own share in order for the task to be completed. As we already concluded, the explicit instruction via picture along with historical and cultural background was more effective than output tasks which are mostly implicit. Such a claim can be considered in setting where learners are after explicit rather than implicit instruction which teaching the teachers' intent and learners' interpretation do not match. All these suggest that it is not the output tasks themselves, but how and under what conditions they are conducted that determines their beneficial effects for idiomatic expression learning.

Although many researchers (Griffin, 2004; Rostamzadeh, 2011; Mustonen, 2010; PACTE, 2011) believe that translation should be based on the assumption that equivalence exists between SL and TL, the CSIs of SL constitute a connotative semantic variable which the teacher cannot ignore this changing and hybrid feature of culture has important consequences for the act of translation. It seems that the risk of not conveying the source message in its totality when dealing with CSIs and that a loss of information might often occur even by using different strategies (Helleklev, 2006; Jensen, 2008; Musonen, 2010; Sornsuwannarsi, 2010). The meaning in translation is constructed by the readers which completely depend on their social position, nationality, political preference and historical background. Therefore, there is a large gap between the theories pertaining to the translation and the actual practice of translators. All of the above stipulated reasons can be the base for lack of efficiency of translation instruction of idioms in this study.

The finding of this study contradicts the presupposition that contrastive analysis between L1 and L2 of idiom reveals their similarities and differences as enhancing factors for the collocations teaching and learning, where attention is drawn to the differences between the L2 and L1 ways of expressing similar meanings.

The analysis of the questionnaire reflected that most of the students tend to focus on meaning and then individual words of idiom for learning idioms. The reason for having these learning traits may be categorized under three headings:

- a. Epistemological frames: Most teachers did not utilize picture and historical background of idiom and output task during their idiom classes since they thought that implicit teaching was deemed to be a potential source of frustration for students. As the result many students preferred a very structured lesson with communicative activities serving to reinforce concepts after explicit instruction.
- b. Cultural norms: Output tasks and picture along the cultural and historical notes would not allow for overt demonstrations of teacher expertise as they always give explanation and controlled activities with worksheet.
- c. Lack of support: Unfamiliarity of mentors who had been educated in the principles of audiolingualism or communicative language teaching with these methods, obligation of teachers to complete the curriculum courses prior to embarking on their practical expiration, i.e. a division between theoretical and practical experiences, and lack of appropriate resources.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The results achieved through instruction with picture and cultural note revealed that this trend indeed did not distract students' attention from the precise verbal input in our study sample since pictures were chosen with significant information relevant to the task and, as proved by the research, actually fostered the learning process. However, sometimes students seemed to zoom on the 'wrong' elements of the scenes depicted by the photographs or drawings in the previous studies.

We also acknowledge that the addition of pictorials and cultural origin can make pedagogical materials more appealing, and that it is thus likely to contribute to positive affect.

Nonetheless, our findings suggest that, when a language learners' objective is to add expressions to their repertoires for active usage, the following learning sequence is recommended: first, the learners' attention is drawn to the linguistic form of an idiom in addition to its meaning, presenting pictorials following the verbal information or by drawing learners' attention explicitly to certain formal features with a mnemonic potential. However, the mnemonic route via the output tasks and translation may just be a dead end when it comes to recollecting a word that has left only but a weak trace in memory.

One of the most difficult problems in teaching idioms through translation is based on the different cultures. It should be highlighted that each language contains elements which are derived from its culture, that each text is anchored in a specific culture, and that conventions of text production and reception vary from culture to culture. This leads to the uniqueness of every translation and, consequently, to different effects on the acquisition of idiom learners.

Maximizing retention of the learned idioms is the responsibility of teachers and teaching material producers. Pictures with historical and cultural notes of idioms are facilitating idiom recognition and active usage. This is particularly encouraging for foreign language classrooms with limited time frame for input.

The following studies could verify the results found by including bigger intake of respondents with different level of English proficiency and the increased number of idiomatic expressions to be mastered. Thus, the subsequent research may focus on other target idioms and level of proficiency of learners. We nevertheless believe our findings call for some realistic, research proven expectations, for the language materials writers, textbook authors and CALL package designers to add pictorials and cultural explanation as indispensable tools to the verbal input for idiom acquisition.

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Appendix 1. Translation text

Translation 1

Somebody told me that you and Doug had been quarreling over the construction site of the new building.

That's true, but we worked out the problem and decided to **bury the hatchet**.

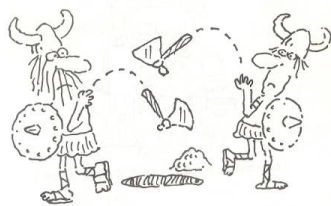
Glad to hear that. You guys have always worked well together.

Well, once we came to the conclusion that we both had the same goal in mind, we **put an end to our bitter feeling and made peace with each other**.

Translation 2

Bob was going to retire from teaching in June, and the foreign language department was planning on presenting him with some luggage at his retirement dinner. He wasn't supposed to know about it, but someone **let the cat out of the bag**. At the dinner Bob acted surprised, even though someone **had told him what he was getting before the official presentation**.

Appendix 2. Picture along cultural origin note



1. Bury the hatchet

Meaning: end a quarrel

Example: After fighting for weeks, they **buried the hatchet**.

Origin: An American Indian custom was to bury a tomahawk or other weapon on the conclusion of a peace. The expression is found in writing as early as the 18th century and came into general use by being popularized in such works as Longfellow's *Song of Hiawatha* (1858).



2. Let the cat out of the bag

Meaning: inform beforehand

Example: Edith's sister **let the cat out of the bag** when she mentioned Edith's new engagement ring.

Origin: At medieval markets, unscrupulous traders would display a pig for sale. However, the pig was always given to the customer in a bag, with strict instructions not to open the bag until they were some way away. The trader would hand the customer a bag containing something and it was only later that the buyer would find he'd been conned when he opened the bag to reveal that it contained a cat, not a pig. Therefore, "letting the cat out of the bag" revealed the secret of the con trick.

Appendix 3. Output tasks

Editing task

Bob wasn't supposed to know about his graduation gift but someone let the cat out of the basket

A B C

ruined everything.

D

Cloze task

A: Doug and I had a great argument, but we worked out the problem and decided to the hatchet.

B: Glad to hear that.

A: Well, once we came to the conclusion that we both had the same goal in mind, we put an end to our feelings and made with each other.

Appendix 4. Style of memory questionnaire

People differ in the types of cognitive or learning strategies they tend to use when learning a figurative expression. The purpose of this questionnaire is to find out what strategy you tend to use. For example, do you often try to remember expressions by associating them with picture? Or do you prefer to connect them to translation perhaps? Or do you exploit the contained word, meaning, memorization or structure for learning? Please circle one of the six options. There is no right or wrong answers.

I try to remember new idioms by.....

- Picture association
- Memorization
- Translation
- The words contained in it
- Its overall meaning
- Its structure